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A

LETTER

FROM A

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER

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BRITISH MUSEUM

A LETTER FROM A PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER TO A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT.

YOur Desire (which has alwayes the force of a Command to me) to give you my Thoughts in Writ, of a Petition given in to His Grace the Duke of *Hamilton* His Majesties High Commissioner and the Honourable Estates of Parliament, by them who conformed to Episcopacy, brings you this Trouble, which a Multitude of my Brethren (were they to undertake the subject of this Missive, and handle it according to the Grace and Wisdom which God hath more copiously given to them) could have done with more Accuracy of Stile, and more Fully and Nervously to the Conviction of these Concerned, particularly the Honourable Members of this present Parliament, than I am capable to do; yet I have exposed this Draught to an observant Generation, and am willing to bear the Censures and Contempt of Many, if I may but contribute some Light to the Consciences of some Well-meaning, but less Discerning and Observant Friends.

The Petition, at first view, seems so plausible, as might challenge Reception from all that love the Advancement of the Great Ends of the Gospel: And truely if the Petitioners had not bewrayed a want of Candor, unworthy of their Character, in their Address to to the last General Assembly, in the Terms of a *Formula*, Adjusted by His Majesty; to which *Formula* in the Letter they closly adhere, but not to His Majesties Meaning, and the genuine Sense of the Words as Conserted for Terms of Communion; The Assembly at that time would have made a considerable progress in laying down such Rules, whereby an effectual Door had been opened for Receiving and Assuming into a share of the Government all duely qualified, of which they only were the competent Judges, especially in the first instance.

Now that the World, as well as our Friends in Parliament, may understand how the late Assembly could not without great Unfaithfulness to God, the King, their Religion and People, receive the Addressers into their Communion; nor will (I hope) this Parliament interpose their Authority for that effect, without an antecedent Judgement of the Church. I shall give an ingenuous Representation of the Matter of Fact, as that Affair was managed before the Assembly.

But lest I be mistaken in the following Lines, I must Preface a few Things. 1. I would Anathematize in my self, and Condemn in others that Malignant and Censorious Zeal that overlooks much Excellence in any, and that envies and dispises all deserving Services, Gifts and Graces, if not seated in, and performed by themselves, and that makes particular Opinions, Modes, Forms and Humors, *the Main*, or *the Only* Terms of Peace and Concord, and that bottoms the Christian Interest, Peace and Welfare of the Churches on any Terms too mean and narrow to sustain them. I shall never neither Value nor Vindicat that Zeal which shuts out those Characters of the Wisdom which is from above mentioned in *James* 3. 17, 18. 2*ly*. I would have no Man think that the Representation of the Addressers Behaviour to the General Assembly is Levelled against all, or the greatest part of that Way, and least of all against many of them

who are in the Exercise of their Ministry on the North side of Tay of whose soundness in the Faith, Piety of Life, and painfulness in their Ministry, we have sufficient Documents, but only against those whose Immoralities, Errors, Non-residence when vessed with a Charge, tampering with persons disaffected to the Government, Civil as well as Ecclesiastick, and other Enormities hath rendred them contemptible in the Eyes of the people, and uncapable of any Office in a well constitute Church. 3*ly*. I would have none to suppose that the Exceptions of the Presbyterian Ministers are mainly against the *Formula*, which in most things coincide with the Act of the General Assembly in the year 1690. instructing their Commissioners anent the Reception of such Ministers into Ministerial Communion, but against their Method of improving it, for it is unconcestable his Sacred Majesty (whose civil Interests are inseparably Complicated and twisted with these of the True Religion) did certainly intend that thereby They should give sufficient Evidence of the Orthodoxy of their Principles. But when the Assembly found it necessar (from the pregnant Grounds of Jealousy Minister'd by not a few of them who openly taught *Arminian* Doctrines at their Synodical Meetings, and Presbytries without being censured: And that Doctor *Monro* a leading man amongst them offered to Subscribe the Confession of Faith and Catechisms as *vinculum pacis*, not *Symbolum fidei*: And withal the *Formula* it self seemed a little dubious, and capable of being stretched to a sinister Sense, whereby all security to our Doctrine was eluded and Evacuat,, as will appear afterward from the particular consideration of the *Formula*, which is the Ground they still stand upon) to interrogate them concerning their meaning of some parts of the Address, how unsatisfactory their Answers were I leave to any Judicious and impartial person to Judge.

I shall pass over their Answer to the first Interrogator without Discanting on it, or drawing these Inferences which natively follow from it, but when I have told you the Question which was, if they owned the Authority of the General Assembly? I shall set down their Answer in their own Words, and leave you to your own Remarks

marks and and Animadversions upon it. The Answer then *in terminis*, was *That they conceive they cannot be obliged to Answer any Questions about any part of the Direction and Address, or to express their Judgment of the Authority of this General Assembly farther then his Majesty hath required them to direct their Address thereunto.*

But the main Question I was concerned about who am neither of a contracted Charity nor a sworn Votary to humane Inventions, and I must confess their stingy Answer did much trouble me. The Question was, *Whether by their promising in that Declaration to sign the* Confession of Faith *and* Catechisms *they do explicitly avow and cordially and firmly profess their belief of the Doctrines therein delivered in opposition to the* Popish, Socinian, Arminian *and other* Tenets, *Doctrines and Opinions contrare to, and inconsistent with the saids* Confession *and* Catechisms? Their Answer to this Question given in by them in writ, no doubt after Deliberation, for time was allowed them for that end was, *That they can give no Explication of any point or Article in the said* Formula *and Declaration it being conserted for them, and seen and approven by his Majesty, and that they are satisfied in Conscience to sign the said* Formula *and* Declaration *in the words as it now stands, and that they can give no Answer, if the whole* Formula *and* Declaration *should be turned into Questions, and that they conceived the words of the* Formula *and Declaration, are as clear as any they can give by way of Explication.*

The Committee of the Assembly found their first Answer unsatisfactory being shifting, and upon the matter a Disowning, or at least a not Owning of this Assembly to be the Lawful General Assembly of the Church of *Scotland*: And their asserting they cannot be oblidged to Answer, does not bear that Candor and Respect which they ought to carry to this Assembly in such a matter, and seems to be inconsistent with that Desire they mention in their Address to exercise their Ministry, in Concurrence with the Presbyterian Ministers.

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Their second Answer was also declared by the Committee no way satisfactory, it being not only a Refusal to explain what appears unclear to the Committee in any part of the *Formula* and Declaration, but also a Refusal of what is most necessar for the security of the Protestant Religion.

Now let the impartial World consider what any conscientious Judicatory upon Earth could have done in such Circumstances, when with a peremptorines very Grievous to some of us, they refused to give the least Satisfaction to any Question concerning their meaning in their *Formula*, nor would the Commissioners from the *North*, viz. Mr. *Forbes*, and another, whose Name I have forgot (both of them grave and pertinent men) Treat with the Assembly for themselves Personally in disjunction from their Constituents: Though the Assembly declared they would admit of no Proxies in this matter, nor of any who did not Personally Compear at this, or some other Lawful Judicatory; the Nature of the Address, and what is thereby craved, being so personal and peculiar to the Addressers themselves. Now could any Men of Conscience admit of all promiscuously, without the least knowledge of them, or Testimony concerning them; yea the Addressors themselves could not read some of their Names, being Ciphered, who were their Constituents, nor give an Account of the Places where they served and were Ministers for the time. But that the Assembly did most sincerely design the Reception of all Worthy Men, is undenyably evident; by what they and inferior Judicatories have already done, I know one Presbytery, where these who are already assumed are the Plurality, so little Jealous or Nice are we in receiving Good Men. And that many more were not assumed before this time, proceeded not from us, but from the Stop that was given to the Committee of the Assemblies Proceeding in the *North*.

But that you may have a full view of the *Formula* or *Test* to be Signed by all those who were to be assumed, I shall here insert it *Verbatim*. *I A. B. do sincerely Declare and Promise that I will submit to the* Presbyterian *Government of the Church, as it is now by Law established in this Kingdom under Their Majesties King* William

William *and Queen* Mary, *by Presbyteries, Provincial Synods, and a General Assembly: And that I will as becomes a Minister of the Gospel, Heartily concur with the said Government for the Suppressing of Sin and Wickedness, the promotion of Piety, and the purging of the Church of all Erroneous and Scandalous Ministers: And I do further Promise, that I will Subscribe the Confession of Faith now confirmed by Act of Parliament; as containing the Doctrine of the Protestant Religion professed in this Kingdom.*

Now though this may well pass with Honest Men, yet the thinking men of the Assembly guided, I hope, by the promised unerring Spirit of Grace, seriously perpending and reflecting upon the *Genius* of some of those with whom they had to do, (for I dare not say but others of them were Sincere in their meaning) who are believed to be Pragmatick Self-designing Men, supported by *Some* at a Distance, who can be pleased with nothing that falls not even with their Sentiments and Ways, and who by all means endeavour to keep them at sinful Distances from Persons better (perhaps) than themselves, because their *Schibboleth* is not pronounced by them; and by *Others* at home, who without breach of Charity are *the Troublers of our* Israel, and down right Enemies to the Government, both Civil and Ecclesiastick; I say the Reverend Assembly considering this, feared that *latet anguis in herba*; and it being their proper Work to Judge of Confessions and Conditions of Communion, they found the Terms of the *Formula* General and Uncertain. And truely it cannot be denied but Ill Men may have a Back-door to go out at in the last and principal Clause of the *Formula*. For if the *as* Reduplicat the Establishment by Act of Parliament and not their own Confession of Faith, there is not the least Security given thereby to our Religion: For I may safely not only Subscribe, but, if I were called to it, Swear the Canons of the Council of *Trent as* the Doctrine of the Church of *Rome*, and the Alcoran *as* the Doctrine of *Mahomet*, and there were not a Word of Truth in one of them, but not *as* the Articles of my Faith; but This I durst neither Subscribe, Say nor Swear, without telling withal that they are not the Articles of my Faith with the same Breath I do the other.

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whatever liberty some of their way may take, who are professed *Arminians*, and yet willing to subscribe this *Formula* without any such Declaration.

But that which most of all troubles me (who have been their Advocate not in a Corner, my meaning is, I have with a particular zeal urged the Reception of those into Church Communion, and a share of the Government, the course of whose Life and Ministry demonstrate them to be *Men of God*, for this is my Test by which I would have them tryed; and then though they were *Jure Divino* Men in the point of *Episcopacy*, of whom I hear there are but very few, and declared at their joyning with us (as the Famous and Renouned Bishop *Usher* for Learning and Piety did to some of our Banished *Presbyterian* Brethren in *Ireland*, when they challenged him for allowing, at least complying with some of the old Corruptions and Trash of *Rome*) *hoc facto propter Evangelium*, they should be a thousand times welcomer to me than those who are most liberal in their Professions of Repentance and Signing of Tests, and yet have skill and cunning enough to wait for every opportunity, and to improve it for the Subversion of the Government I say that which most of all troubles me is the Petition just now given into this present Parliament, which makes them lyable to the most perplexing exceptions that can be made against them. For beside that it was an unkindly thing, unbecoming a true Son of the Church to exhibite a Complaint and Lybel Her as Arbitrary in Her Refusal of their Address, and all this to the High Court of Parliament: In the Petitory part they seem to have forgot themselves; for though their late *Episcopal* Government, was built upon no other Foundation, and advanced by no other Methods then Civil Laws Rigorously executed, without any consequent, far less antecedent determination of any Church Judicatory: The Honourable Parliament they now apply unto, will certainly abhor that down right gross *Erastianism*, the like whereof is not to be found in the World, as it would appear They desire the Honourable States of Parliament to set up, for as I understand them, they would have an Independent *Imperium in Imperio*, which cannot miss in a short

time to Issue in that which will be evertive of the one, and fatal to both. But do they not well know that our Gracious King and Parliament has established *Presbyterian* Government, as it was in the year 1592. And His Majesty has given repeated Assurances to the Church, That he will inviolably preserve it all His Life? Do they think then that they will destroy what they have Built, and pluck up what they have planted, which agrees so well with the Soyl, and wants not its Divine Warrant.

I am told they are but few who Joyn in this Petition, and most of these from their Consciousness to themselves of their Insufficiency, Profanity or Heterodoxy, Dispair of Admission into the Brotherhood of the *Presbyterians*, and therefore would climb up to any Window, if so be they might have Entrance, and thereby access to their Livings and Stipends, but have no Tenderness for our Lords Mediatory Crown, and the Priviledges he has purchased and conferred upon his Church, which do not in the least interfere with Magistrates Prerogatives. For our Learned and Wise Parliament know, our Principles ascribe as much power to them in reference to the Church, as any Wise and Pious Magistrate will require. We grant the Magistrate hath a power, for repairing a broken Church, though not for Constituting the frame of its Government, and building such a Fabrick of a Church as he pleases. A power for calling Church Assemblies to meet for the Government of the Church, though not a power of hindering them to meet at all; a Power of defending the True Religion, the Doctrine, Worship, Discipline and Government of the Church; though not a power to determine concerning these things at his pleasure, a power to concurre by his Civil Sanction with the Determinations of the Church, and confirm their Obligation on his Subjects, tho' not a power to force the Church to follow his Dictats in Things Ecclesiastick. And in a Word we grant him all power even in Ecclesiasticks, that is Cumulative to the Churches Advantage, tho we deny him to have any Privative power to the Churches Prejudice, and our Fittedness to thir Principles is sufficiently confirmed, because we could never be driven from them by a Tract of many Years violent Persecution.

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And now because this Scribling of mine may go Abroad, and amongst others reach the hands of those who are of the Episcopal way, I'll gratify a little the frankness of my own natural Disposition, and deal roundly with the Episcopal Brethren, and their Adherents and Abettors: Only with this precaution, that whatever indiscretion Defects or Mistakes, what I say may be Taxed with, these may not be casten upon my Brethren, For I ingenuously declare, that by Counsel Knowledge nor Contryvance, they have no accession to it: And therefore let all these be lodged at my own Door, and tho I be so tender of my self, as to conceal my Name; Yet I fear the Bluntness of the Stile Father it self, and tho I expect to be lashed with Tongues, as sometimes perharps I have been undeservedly; yet in my humble Fitts, the desire, endeavour and design of my Poor Soul is to think as meanly of my self as others can, but seldom or never is my mind shaken with fear, tho alace other passions equally dangerous are more predominat in me.

Let me therefore ask the Brethren and others of that way, What makes you stand aloof and keep at so great distance from Conformity unto the present Establishment, We who are Presbyterians cannot be so unthankful to you, but we must acknowledge (and I perswade my self the late King *James* knows it) that these of your Holy Order, and Perswasion had the most Active Chief and pincipal hand in the late happy Revolution, (Pray let me not be mistaken it's the Bishops and others in our neighbour Kingdom of *England* I speak of, for our *Scottish* Bishops gave a most seasonable Testimony of their Loyalty, expressing their Detestation of the then Prince of *Orange* his coming to *England*, as an unjust and unnatural Invasion signed by them all. Of this I crave pardon to be a Remembrancer to our Parliament and yet I cannot deny but they ought to be excused if they be all of a Piece, and make no Bonds to declare (as some of them did) these wished rather to see Popery set up in *Scotland* then Presbytry) And tho 'tis not to be doubted, but the Presbyterians in both Kingdoms had good will enough, and were as Active as was possible: Yet his present Majesty is more adebted to them for their cordial Reception of him, and close adhereing to

him then for the change that was made, and truely were I in their predicament I would value my party on that head, and improve it. But when I put my thoughts to the Rack to find out why it is they improve not this Advantage, I cannot suppose it flows from a stupid carelessness, this may be the case of such poor Souls among whom there hath been no Vision, whose idol Shepherds have made them like themselves without any spiritual Sense: Sometimes I think 'tis Policy their carnal Wisdom teaching them to stand as Spectators, and when things come to a perfect setlement they think to have a share in the Benefit, tho they have nothing at stake: In others I think it fear lest their Trade go down, and no wonder tho such Crafts-men make an Uproar and cry up their *Diana*, or be content to divide the living Child and make a mixture like the transplanted Nations 2 *King*, 19. Who feared the Lord and served graven Images others fear the Refiners fire and Fullers sope when the sons of *Levi* come to be tryed, purified, and purged, but there is no fear that the Ark of God will smite any with Emrods and afflict him, unless he be a *Philistine*, in others 'tis pride affectation of singularity, rash Vows never to conform to Presbytry; and big Expectations of a new Revolution, I would have all separatists Examine their Principles by the Touchstone of the Sanctuary, for in my Life I could never understand what could justifie separation, but when the Terms of Communion were unlawful.

And now I crave pardon for my long Letter, and shall presume to give you my Advice while ye are at the Helm of Government, and because I love to offend no Friend to our Cause I give it you in the words of the great Apostle of the Gentiles, *Let your Moderation be known to all men, the Lord is at hand.* Which I propose as the best expedient to prevent Convulsions in Church and State; I remember a significant Sentence of an *English* man. *Power is a Liquid Substance, put it in what Vessels you will, 'tis apt to run over, Are there not with you, even with you Sins against the Lord your God.*

I have but two or three words more which I cannot ommit, Maintain Unity amongst your selves, intertain no enemy in your Bosoms, for one secret enemy admitted to your Counsels is more dangerous

then ten Thousand open and declared enemies: And as ye desire to prosper and would have God to Bless you, fail not by a full clear and incontravertable Act of Parliament (that the present Judges may be ashamed to fly in the face of) to Restore and Redintegrat these poor broken Sufferers by Forfaultures, Fines, and other wayes for Conscience sake in the Late Times, to whose Prayers and these of their Predecessors, called *Puritans*, who bare the Heat and Burden of the Day, ye owe your Deliverance, it is not Charity but Justice to refresh their Bowels, and that these Leeches and Spunges that have suckt themselves full, and raised their Fortunes upon their Ruines, be left as dry as they were at first, if they would follow my Advice they would restore of their own accord what they have unjustly purchased: For it is an uncontroverted Maxim in Divinity, *non tollitur peccatum ni restituatur Oblatum*. But if this be not to be expected of most of them; then pray let Justice be speeded, that Expences and Attendance upon Law Suits eat not out and exhaust the Principal in question, and the little Stock that by a providence was hid from their Enemies. But above all my earnest desire is, That our Blessed LORD were first set into the full possession of His Right, and that His Tabernacle were pitch, before any of the Lots for our own Liberties or Interests were drawn; This is that which *David Sware unto the Lord, and Vowed unto the Mighty God of Jacob, surely I will not come into the Tabernacle of my House: nor go up into my Bed: I will not give sleep to mine Eyes: or slumber to mine Eye-lids: until I find out a place for the Lord: an habitation for the Mighty God of Jacob. Psal.* 132. 2, 3, 4, 5. Now that the Lord may enable you first to Faithfulness and Thankfulness to God, and then to our Saviour and Deliverer under him the Kings most Excellent Majesty (whose praises without being a plagiary I would but obscure, but you may read them in their due Elevation in the Sermons published since the Revolution by *Tillotson*, *Burnet*, *Patrick*, and others) And *that our Jerusalem may be beautiful for situation, the the Joy of the whole earth, and God known in her Palaces for a Refuge* under the auspicious Government of our King and Parliament, is the hearty Prayer of

Your Real Friend and Humble Servant.

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